



THE LIBRARY
THE UNIVERSITY
OF TEXAS

THE
ABRAHAM I SCHECHTE
COLLECTION OF
HEBRAICA AND JUDAICA
PRESENTED BY
THE KALLAH OF
TEXAS RABBIS

1939

R
Sch
416

JEWS & CHRISTIANS:

A PLEA FOR GOODWILL
AND FELLOWSHIP

Sermon

Preached at the

Golders Green Synagogue

LONDON, N.W.11

on

SUNDAY, MAY 7th, 1933

by

THE REV. I. LIVINGSTONE,

at a

Special Service

In honour of the Election of

ALDERMAN SIDNEY BOLSOM, J.P.

as Mayor of St. Pancras.

SHARP & SONS, BATH.

JEWS & CHRISTIANS:

A PLEA FOR GOODWILL
AND FELLOWSHIP



Sermon

Preached at the

Golders Green Synagogue

LONDON, N.W.11

on

SUNDAY, MAY 7th, 1933

by

THE REV. I. LIVINGSTONE,

at a

Special Service

In honour of the Election of

ALDERMAN SIDNEY BOLSON, J.P.

as Mayor of St. Pancras.

Order of Service

INTRODUCTORY VERSES (CHOIR)

AFTERNOON SERVICE

SERMON AND PRAYER

PRAYER FOR THE KING
AND ROYAL FAMILY

ALENU

PSALM 150

ADON OLAM

GOD SAVE THE KING

The Service was attended by the Members and Officers of the St. Pancras Borough Council, by Mayors of neighbouring Boroughs, by the Members of the Rotary Clubs of St. Pancras and Hendon, and by other prominent representatives of religious and civic bodies.

Jews and Christians: A Plea for Goodwill and Fellowship.

"Have we not all one Father; has not one God created us?" (Malachi iii. 10).

A service in a synagogue is, as a rule, attended by a congregation of Jewish worshippers; and, similarly, when Christian men and women wish to attend a place of worship, they generally go to a church or chapel of their own denomination. Moreover, the addresses or sermons that are given in the various places of worship frequently deal with the obligations which devolve upon the worshippers as members of their specific denomination. It is, of course, right and proper and natural that such specific duties and responsibilities should be urged from time to time, as long as this emphasis is not done in too narrow a spirit. There are, however, occasions when a kind of special service is held—a service to which prominent citizens who happen to belong to various denominations are definitely invited. And it seems to me that when such a congregation is gathered together—particularly when it consists of Jews and Christians, as it does at this service—opportunity might be taken to point out that, although there

is a clear distinction in theological thought which permanently divides the Jew from the Christian, and although this divergence in thought and standpoint is by no means a small one, both Jews and Christians recognise that they have one Father, one Creator. We all pray to God, and our moral and ethical systems are, for all practical purposes, the same. A partition wall does divide the Jew from the non-Jew. But this wall is not so high that we cannot shake hands across it. And I hold very strongly to the belief that, whilst each can and should remain loyal to his own faith, there is no reason why Jews and Christians should not live on terms of the utmost cordiality, goodwill and friendship. There is no reason why there should not exist between the adherents of the two religions a spirit of mutual understanding and respect.

Men and women of the various religious faiths, mostly believe, of course, that their own faith is the right one. Men and women of the various political creeds mostly believe that their political creed is the one which everyone should follow. I remember once hearing an argument in which one said to the other, "I hope the time will come when everyone will come round to my way of thinking." The other replied, with, I think, more broadmindedness, "Well, I hope that the time will come when each man will try to discover that which is good and true in the other man's point of view." I would, indeed, venture to say that no one—either in politics or in religion—can claim a monopoly of excellence for his own way of thinking. And the point I wish to make, as far

as religious thought is concerned, is well illustrated by the old story of "The Three Rings," in Lessing's "Nathan the Wise." Lessing you know, was one of the founders of modern German literature, and he wrote "Nathan the Wise" as a protest against racial and theological intolerance. Is it not sad to think that, in the land of Lessing, movements for promoting peace and goodwill are being swept away, and the whole principle of comradeship and fellowship has given place to a brutal policy of persecution and unreasoning oppression? I will only say, in reference to the revolting anti-Semitism in Germany—for the welfare of which country its Jewish citizens have always loyally given of their best, as many as 12,000 German Jews having laid down their lives for their country in the Great War—I will only say this: that we are profoundly grateful to the British Press and to all sections of the religious, political, civic and commercial life of this country, for their evidence of sincere sympathy with our people, and for their indignation at the calculated and systematic persecution of minorities. I very much hope that protest meetings will have some effect in persuading the German Government to stop its acts of injustice and its intolerance.

I am not able, to prescribe a cure for anti-Semitism. Perhaps the Jewish problem will be partly solved by the effort to weld the scattered remnants of Israel into a unity. We Jews are a people bound together by a consciousness which is partly psychological, partly religious, and partly cultural. And we will continue to dream and

work, with more or less enthusiasm, for a restoration in which there will be one spot where a full Jewish life may be lived, and from which Jewish thought and Jewish ideals may again develop and evolve. Perhaps that will partly help in finding a solution for the homelessness which for so many thousands of us is aggravated by the forces of economic discrimination and social anti-Semitism. But, really, it will not solve the problem altogether, for anti-Semitism is one of those evils which face the whole of civilisation—the attitude of man to man. It is part of that spirit which causes one country or race to despise or fear another country or race, one religion to be jealous of another religion. Thank God that although religious prejudices are not at all a thing of the past in this country, there is in the average Englishman a spirit of justice and fair play, a love of freedom and equality; and, as a general rule, the Jew who respects his religion and the high ethical ideals of his own faith receives the respect of the non-Jews who know him for what he is. And in a country like this, where we have the opportunity of living as full and complete citizens, we are only too glad to shoulder our civic responsibilities, and we are happy to co-operate with our fellow-citizens of the Christian faith—to co-operate with them in all that makes for true progress.

Among the members of this Synagogue who have been able to give of their time and their ability to civic work, there are some who have reached very high positions. As many of you know, two years ago we had a Civic Service for one of our members who

became Chairman of the Hendon Urban District Council, as it then was, and who afterwards was elected the Deputy Charter Mayor. Prior to that, another of our members held office as Mayor of Stepney. But our service to-day is held in honour of one of our present Honorary Officers, to mark his year of office as Mayor of St. Pancras. Many warm tributes have been paid to him for the work that he has done, and is doing, in that Borough in particular, and we pray that God may give to him, and to the Mayoress, perfect health and strength, so that they may go on giving of their best for the benefit of their fellow-citizens, and gaining their continued confidence and respect. When a member of the Jewish community is given a civic honour of this kind, he assumes a double responsibility. He has to take charge of the public interests in general, but he also has to do his best to reflect honour on Jewry and Judaism and to raise the prestige of the position of the Jew among his neighbours. I know, and we all know, that the Mayor and Mayoress of St. Pancras are discharging this two-fold responsibility to the full. And so, in the name of the Congregation, I extend to them a most cordial welcome, and offer them our sincerest good wishes.

I am also pleased, to see present several Mayors of metropolitan boroughs, and nearly all the Aldermen and Councillors of St. Pancras, with their ladies. They loyally serve their own local interests with enthusiasm, but I know that many of them are also ready, at all times, to do all they can outside their own neighbourhood and in wider spheres. I am very

happy to note, too, that a goodly number of Rotarians—both from the Hendon Club and the St. Pancras Club—are joining in this service. It is a pleasure for me to co-operate with business and professional men of all shades of political and religious opinion, when they strive to encourage the application of the ideal of Service as the basis of all worthy enterprise, and when they foster the spirit of understanding, goodwill and peace between individuals, religions and nations.

But let me revert to the story of the "Three Rings," to which I referred a few minutes ago, and which I said would illustrate the fact that no one can claim to have a monopoly of excellence for his own way of thinking. It is a story which a Jew tells to the Sultan in answer to the question, "Which faith is the true faith?" In a certain family there had been handed down from father to son a ring of priceless value. It was a ring of matchless brilliance, and it was believed to bring happiness, health and good fortune to everyone who wore it. It was always bequeathed by the father to the favourite son, with the request that he in his turn would leave it to the son that he loved best. Now there came a time when the ring was possessed by the father who loved his three sons equally. He could not decide to which one to give the ring. At one moment he may have loved one son best; but the very next moment he thought the second son was best; and a moment later he thought the third son was best. So, when he felt that he was about to die, he called each son

to his bed-side separately, and promised the ring to each one, for he could not bear to disappoint any one of them. And then, unknown to his sons, he sent for a skilful jeweller, and ordered him to make two other rings exactly like the true one. This was done, and the imitations proved to be so excellent that the old man himself could not tell which was the original ring. He then called for each son privately, giving him his blessing and one of the rings. And so each son thought that *he* had the wonderful ring, and kept the secret to himself. After the father's death, each son produced his ring, and claimed that his was the genuine one. Each swore that his father had promised the ring to him, and each declared that the other two were imitations. So they went to a great judge for his decision. He watched them quarrelling among themselves, and listened to the way in which they attacked each other, and then he said, "Is it not a fact that your father told you that the genuine ring had the magic power of beautifying and ennobling the life of the one who possessed it?" They agreed that that was so. The judge then went on, "Which of you loves his two brothers best? He surely must be the owner of the ring." They remained silent. "It seems to me," continued the judge, "that these rings only make you love yourselves. Perhaps not one of these rings is the genuine one. However, take my advice. Each of you believes that he possesses the true ring. Then let it be to each of you the true ring. Be glad that you all have an equal share of your

father's impartial love. Let each of you do his best to show the virtue of his ring—not by claiming lordship, and acting unjustly and unmercifully to his brothers, by but gentleness, by benevolence, by forbearance. If the virtue of the ring continue among your children, and your children's children, and their children after them, then, when a few thousand years have rolled on, let your descendants appear before their judge, and he will be able to determine, by the life you and they have lived, by the ideals you and they have cherished, by the works you and they have accomplished—he will be able to determine which of you has the genuine ring." That was the end of the story which the Jew told the Sultan in the dramatic poem, "Nathan the Wise," by Gotthold Lessing, the celebrated German writer—the dramatist who was an inspiration to Goethe and Schiller. I should add that when he had finished the story, he suggested that Saladin should decide who had the true ring. But Saladin replied, "Who am I to decide? I am but dust. The Eternal God will decide. His judgment seat is not mine. His thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are His ways our ways."

"Nathan the Wise," was, by the way, first produced as a play exactly 150 years ago. It was regarded as one of the greatest pleas for toleration ever penned, and it helped a great deal to improve the conditions of Jews and others who had been oppressed. To-day, however, Justice, Liberty and Tolerance have been displaced in Germany by a perverted form of narrow nationalism which is a disgrace to civilisation. And the Senate of Hamburg, where Lessing

for a time made his home, has actually discontinued the award of the annual Lessing Memorial Prize, so that the name of this great German pioneer of Toleration might, perhaps, be forgotten. But the message which I would convey this afternoon to each man and woman in this mixed congregation of Jews and non-Jews, is this: If your religion helps you serve your fellow-men, if your religion helps you to be loyal and steadfast to the eternal ideals of love and righteousness, of peace and brotherhood, then indeed it has a true ring in it. Faith is important. Belief is important. To belong to a place of worship, and to attend Divine service regularly is very valuable. But, after all, when our life is ended, the question that will be asked of each one of us will be, not "Which place of worship did you attend?" but "What was the character of your life?"

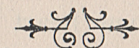
Not, How did he die? but, How did he live?
Not, What did he gain? but, What did he give?
These are the units to measure the worth
Of a man, as a man, regardless of birth.

I remember the apt reply which a shrewd old countryman gave to a clergyman who was attempting to convert him from his theological beliefs. The old man, after listening patiently to the conversionist's arguments, said: "You know, from this village to the market place there are three roads. There's the straight road along the valley, the old coach road over the hills, and the main road running alongside the park wall. When I get my wheat to the market town,

they don't say to me, "Hullo, John, which road did you come by?" but, "What's your wheat like."

The Children of Israel, are certainly exhorted to follow the old paths of Jewish religious obligation. It is the duty of every Jew and Jewess to be loyal to these old paths—to the ideas and ideals of a faith which will never grow stale, to the observances and rites which preserve us as a people with a message to humanity. But whilst it is the duty of Jews to be loyal to Judaism, we believe—and the outstanding exponents of Judaism strengthen this belief—that the other great religions of the world are some of God's many forces for bringing about the ultimate brotherhood of man. They serve a purpose which is equally divine. The Children of Israel have a special mission as Jews. But if, in the days of old, the prophet Isaiah could exclaim, in the name of God, "Blessed be Egypt, My people, and Assyria, the work of My hands, and Israel, Mine inheritance," then we can surely say to-day that salvation is attained, not so much by theological creed, as by the love of God fulfilling itself in action. "Open ye the gates," exclaimed Isaiah, "that the righteous may enter therein." And, as the Rabbis note, it does not say that the priest, or the Levite, or even that Israel, may enter the gates, but the righteous, those whose actions are meritorious, to whatever nation or faith they belong. The loyal Jew who listens to the exhortation of Jeremiah, asks for the old paths and walks therein. But he recognises all the time that the righteous of all nations and all faiths will surely find favour in the eyes of the Father of us all.

My message, therefore to the men and women who are assembled here this day, is: Remain firm to the principles of the religious denominations to which you belong, but, wherever you can, combine your energies for promoting good and destroying evil. Argue less, and try to understand one another more. Dispute less, and love more, for companionship is sweet, and, in religion as in politics, fellowship is the law of life. There are many divisions and many banners, there are different uniforms and diverse equipments, but let us always bear in mind that there is one Commander over us all. "Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us?"



Prayer.

Almighty God,

We thank Thee for thy mercies, and for Thy goodness, and we ask for Thy blessing.

Grant us the spirit of wisdom and understanding that we may do that which is pleasing unto Thee.

Bestow Thy blessing upon the Mayor and Mayoress of St. Pancras, in whose special honour this service is being held.

Bless his colleagues, the chief citizens of the other metropolitan boroughs. Bless the Aldermen and Councillors who are charged with the care of the public interests, and are honoured with the public confidence. Bless those who foster the ideal of service in their personal, their business, and their community life. Bless the people of Israel. Deliver them from hatred and persecution, and shelter them from the fury of the oppressor. Vouchsafe Thy light and Thy truth unto all the peoples on earth, that they may understand that righteousness alone exalteth a nation, and that by might no man or kingdom will truly prosper.

Implant Thou a new heart and a faithful spirit in the peoples, that they may form a true league of nations to do Thy will with a perfect heart, and that the days may be hastened when the children of men will understand that they have One Father—that One God has created us all. May He bless us and preserve us. May He cause His countenance to shine upon us. And may He strengthen us in our efforts for brotherhood and peace.

Amen.